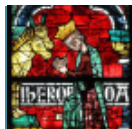


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Britain Pulled the Strings and Netanyahu Warned New Zealand It Was Declaring War: New Details on Israel's Battle Against the UN Vote

The British secretly worked the Palestinians and urged New Zealand to move ahead with the resolution, and a call from Netanyahu to Putin triggered a real drama at the UN HQ just one hour before the vote.

Barak Ravid | [Send me email alerts](#)

Dec 28, 2016 9:15 AM



Clockwise from top left: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Russian President Vladimir Putin, British Prime Minister Theresa May, New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCull Credit: Olivier Fitoussi, Sputnik/Mikhail Klimientyev/Kremlin/Reuters, Ben Stansall/AFP, Mark Ralston/Pool Photo/AP

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Last Friday, a few hours before the UN Security Council vote on the settlements, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu phoned New Zealand's foreign minister, Murray McCully. New Zealand, together with Senegal, Malaysia and Venezuela, was leading the move to resubmit for a vote the resolution from which Egypt had backed down the day before.

A few hours earlier, a senior official in the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem called New Zealand's ambassador to Israel, Jonathan Curr, and warned that if New Zealand's move came to a vote, Israel might close its embassy in Wellington in protest. Ambassador Curr noted this and reported it to his government, but when dawn came in New York Israel understood that things were still moving ahead.

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Netanyahu's phone call to McCully was almost his last attempt to prevent the vote, or at least to postpone it and buy a little time. Western diplomats say the conversation was harsh and very tense and Netanyahu let loose with sharp threats, perhaps unprecedented in relations between Israel and another Western country.

"This is a scandalous decision. I'm asking that you not support it and not promote it," Netanyahu told McCully, according to the Western diplomats, who asked to remain unnamed due to the sensitivity of the matter. "If you continue to promote this resolution from our point of view it will be a declaration of war. It will rupture the relations and there will be consequences. We'll recall our ambassador to Jerusalem." McCully refused to back down from the vote. "This resolution conforms to our policy and we will move it forward," he told Netanyahu.

Just one month earlier, when McCully visited Israel and met with Netanyahu, he found the latter an entirely different man. Netanyahu was pleasant, friendly and overflowing with warmth. He showed McCully the famous PowerPoint presentation that he had shown in a round of background briefings for the media last summer. Laser pointer in hand, Netanyahu told McCully that Israel was expanding its foreign relations, breaking through in the region and making friends in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The Western diplomats said that McCully, who over the past two years had been consistently pushing the Israeli-Palestinian issue in the UN Security Council, spoke with Netanyahu about the resolution his country wanted to promote. It was a much softer and more moderate version than the motion that passed last Friday. New Zealand's resolution did talk about freezing construction in the settlements, but also about freezing Palestinian steps in the UN and the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and called for direct negotiations without preconditions.

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UN Speeches: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu



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Netanyahu rejected this outright. If it were up to him, the Palestinian issue would not have come up in the meeting at all. His message to McCully was similar to what he said endlessly in public over the past few weeks. The world doesn't care too much about the Palestinian issue. The automatic majority against Israel in the UN is about to become a thing of the past. "The vote Friday proved differently and showed that Netanyahu's assessment was wrong," a Western diplomat said.

Discussions with Western and Israeli diplomats reveal many interesting details about some of what happened behind the scenes at UN headquarters in New York between Thursday afternoon, when Egypt announced it was backing down from the resolution on the settlements, and Friday morning, when New Zealand, Senegal, Malaysia and Venezuela announced that they would continue to push for a vote.



Behind the scenes of the UN vote. Credit: Haaretz

Form the moment Egypt backed down on Thursday, the Western and Israeli diplomats say, New Zealand, Senegal, Malaysia and Venezuela were pressured to move ahead anyway. The Palestinians were the first to exert pressure, but they were joined by some of the Gulf States and Britain. The Western diplomats said that the British encouraged New Zealand to continue pushing for a vote even without Egyptian support.

The British had become active regarding the resolution a few days earlier. The Israeli diplomats say that from information that reached the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, British legal figures and diplomats had been working directly with the Palestinians on the wording of the resolution even before it was distributed by Egypt the first time on Wednesday evening. According to the Israeli diplomats, the British did this secretly and without informing Israel.

The suspicion in Jerusalem is that the British had been working during all those days for the Americans to make sure the resolution was to U.S. President Barack Obama's liking, but without the need to intervene directly in formulating it.

"We know how to read Security Council resolutions," a senior Israeli diplomat says. "This is not a text that was formulated by the Palestinians or Egypt, but by a Western power." Israel's ambassador to the U.S., Ron Dermer, said in interviews with the American media on Monday that Israel had proof that the Obama

is not clear whether this was what he meant.

Western diplomats partially confirm the description of their Israeli colleagues. They say that the British had indeed played a major role in formulating the resolution and revamping it with the Palestinians. However, they said they have no proof that it was the U.S. administration that was behind the whole move.

“The British helped tone down the text so it would meet the American threshold and so it could be passed without a veto,” one of the Western diplomats said.

Netanyahu’s phone conversation with New Zealand’s foreign minister did not put an end to attempts to prevent the vote on Friday evening. A few hours before the vote, the prime minister called Russian President Vladimir Putin and tried to persuade him. Just the day before, Israel had acceded to a Russian request and had [absented itself from a vote in the UN General Assembly on a resolution regarding war crimes in Syria](#).

It is not entirely clear what happened in the conversation between Netanyahu and Putin, but less than an hour before the vote a real drama took place at the UN headquarters in New York. While the Security Council member-states were preparing their speeches ahead of the vote and the public discussion that was held immediately that was to follow, the Russian UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin suddenly asked for a closed consultation.

A Western diplomat said that Churkin shocked the other ambassadors of the 14 Security Council member-states when he proposed postponing the vote until after Christmas. There had not been enough discussion on the wording of the resolution, Churkin claimed, and said he was surprised at the haste of some of the countries to hold a vote as quickly as possible. The deputy Russian ambassador to Israel, Alexy Drobinin, confirmed this in an interview with Army Radio on Tuesday morning.

Drobinin told Army Radio that Russia had objections to the timing of the resolution and that Russia’s representative in New York was the only one who asked to continue discussing it. Drobinin said it should be taken into consideration that a few weeks from now there would be a new administration in the United States, and that Russia

All

He said the problem was not the content, but the timing and the fact that the resolution related only to one out of the many core issues of the conflict.

But Churkin's remarks fell on deaf ears. Most of the representatives at the meeting rejected them and demanded to move ahead on the vote as planned. A Western diplomat said that the Russian ambassador, who realized that he had not managed to garner support, backed down and summarized the consultation with a typically cynical remark about the proposal abandoned by Egypt – he said that never in his life had he seen so many people wanting to adopt an orphan so quickly.

The meeting ended, the ambassadors entered the Security Council chamber and a few minutes later they passed the resolution.



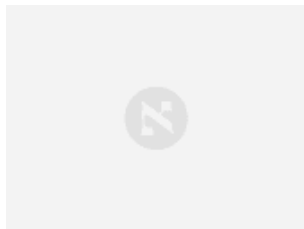
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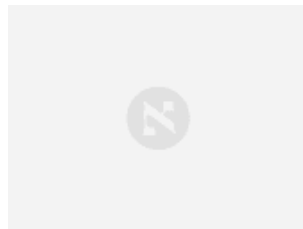
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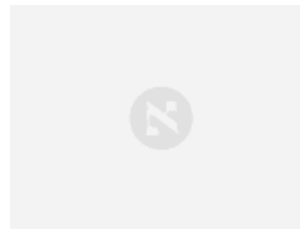
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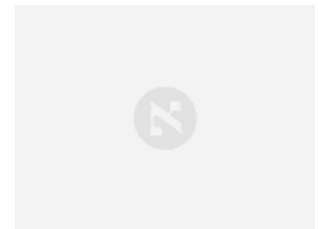
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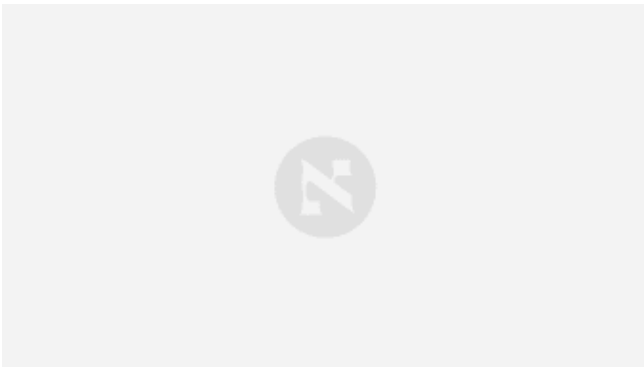
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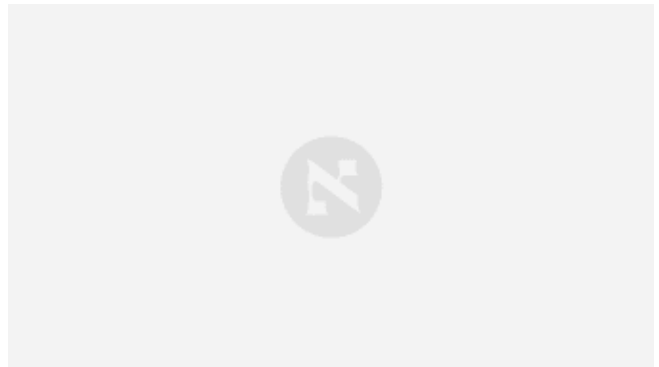
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